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SUBJECT Claire Sterling

BILL KURTIS: To author Claire Sterling, the world has been strangely unmoved by the attempt to kill the Pope in 1981. Even after the arrest of Mehmet Ali Agca even after his trial, even after he had admitted being part of a conspiracy, there was no great outcry for justice. To be sure, Agca was sentenced to life in prison, but the case is still far from closed. He reenacted the crime for the Italian courts and has named names that lead Mrs. Sterling to conclude that not only has the Pope forgiven Agca, but so have the CIA and the Western governments. And in her new book "The Time of the Assassins," she claims the allies are trying to cover all this up.

As a matter of fact, you were rather strong on that subject, calling to a deception. By whom?

CLAIRE STERLING: Yes, I think it's a deception, and a sleazy deception, really, by practically all the Western powers; but most importantly, by the U.S. intelligence establishment, which has tried from the day the investigating judge in Italy arrested a Bulgarian named Antonov as a direct accomplice of Agca's, has tried to discredit Agca as a nut case, a known crazy, a fool, a compulsive liar, and has maintained, by giving information, six major articles of comments by unidentified U.S. intelligence analysts saying that there was no Bulgarian connection; or that the Bulgar -- he was working for the Bulgarians, but he didn't know he meant to kill the Pope; or they knew it and they didn't stop him, but they had nothing to do with it; or they knew it, but they didn't tell the Russians. In short, every effort was made. Within a period of five months, six major articles appeared in the American press from these unidentified intelligence analysts in Washington attempting to persuade the public that there was no such thing as a Bulgarian connection or